
Stem cell banking workshop explores ethical and policy issues

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At the 2010 Stem Cell Banking Workshop on May 26, CIRM president Alan Trounson discussed the potential value of a cell bank designed to support the needs of researchers and industry. Many of the participants believe there would be great scientific value in a bank that could provide a common approach to cell collection and distribution.

The workshop was designed to give special attention to ethical concerns related to the collection, creation, use and sharing of stem cells. Foremost, were ethical concerns about how to tell potential donors about how their cells will be used. This process referred to as "informed consent" is the cornerstone of research ethics. Participants agreed donors need to understand the following:

- What type of experiments their cell may be used in
- How their privacy will be protected
- Whether or not they would get any medical benefit from donating
- Whether they can discontinue participation in the future (e.g. withdraw from the bank)

The workshop was not designed to answer these questions, but rather explore how these issues are being addressed already and consider how CIRM may adopt best practices. CIRM staff were asked to provide a report in the future. Workshop panelists included leading researchers and cell banking organizations. They provided cogent recommendations and offered concise insights for how these issues can be addressed.

In addition, they provided estimates of the costs and organizational capacity needed to run a cell bank. Overall, the workshop achieved its primary goal and served to stimulate discussion on a range of ethical and policy issues. A complete transcript will be available in June 2010.

- Geoff Lomax
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